

June 16 Soft Launch of Civil Commitment Laws

June 4, 2014

Overview of June 16 Soft Launch

The 2014 General Assembly Session passed a number of legislative changes to Virginia's civil commitment laws that are scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2014. CSBs, state facilities and their safety net partners, including local hospitals, emergency departments, law enforcement agencies, and others, have developed new regional admission protocols based on these new laws. DBHDS is planning a "soft launch" in advance of the July 1 enactment to help identify any procedural issues and pressure points that can be addressed before the July 1 effective date. **The soft launch will begin on June 16, 2014 at 8:30 a.m.** and at that time, DBHDS and CSBs will operate as if all aspects of the new legislation are in effect (with the exception of the 8-hour emergency custody order period which cannot take effect until July 1).

Changes for Soft Launch

The changes that will go into effect on June 16 for the soft launch include:

- Implementation of new statutory notification requirements, such as between law enforcement and CSBs at the time an ECO is executed, between CSBs and state hospitals when a CSB is notified of the need for an emergency evaluation, and between CSBs and state hospitals upon completion of an ECO evaluation;
- Implementation of regional admission protocols (to be completed June 13, 2014);
- Referral to primary state facility when alternative facility of temporary detention cannot be found; and
- Use of alternative facilities when primary state hospital is at full capacity or otherwise cannot serve as "facility of last resort."

Meeting Communication Needs

It is essential that this information is communicated clearly to all partners and individuals involved in carrying out these changes. DBHDS and the Office of the Attorney General have conducted several trainings already to inform people about the changes and to respond to questions. Additional trainings will be conducted in Fairfax (June 19) and Hampton (June 23) and at the upcoming CSB emergency services conference (June 17-18). DBHDS will meet with state mental health hospital directors and a broader system stakeholder group next week about the upcoming changes. Also, DBHDS will be creating a new page available on its website as a one-stop reference source for accessing training presentations, legislative information, procedures, guidance, FAQs, and other helpful information. This page will continue to evolve as more information becomes available, and a link will be found on the homepage at www.dbhds.virginia.gov. It is critical that CSB executive directors use this information along with the regional protocols to ensure all emergency services workers and other staff involved in the commitment process are fully informed of the changes and of the new procedures for emergency custody and temporary detention.

Data Collection

DBHDS will be implementing data collection and system performance measures to ensure we are capturing key information on the effectiveness and efficiency of these changes as well as how these changes affect the community and facility systems.

Partnerships

The June 16 soft launch will be of great benefit to all of the system partners. It is an opportunity for us to collaboratively test important aspects of these changes and make any necessary adjustments in advance of the July 1 implementation date. These soft launch efforts, effective and ongoing communication, and collecting meaningful data can help ensure an already complex process for individuals experiencing mental health crises is not made more difficult and fulfills its primary mission of serving individuals appropriately and well.